

In the presence of the Red-breasted Dotterels, one of which was seen to make a run at it, the stranger was uneasy and alert, and sometimes nervously bobbed its head. Unfortunately when it flew it went into the sun so that we were deprived of the opportunity of noting any further features. However from our knowledge of plovers and dotterels in New Zealand and after consulting the relevant literature, we are forced to the conclusion that the 'difficult' wader which we watched near Paua and which we have attempted to describe could only have been an Oriental Dotterel (*C. asiaticus veredus*).

REVIEWS

NEW ZEALAND BIRDS, by W. R. B. Oliver (revised and enlarged edition). A. H. & A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1955. £6/-/-

Ever since 1930 Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* has been the standard work, and so the appearance of a new edition, revised and enlarged, is a notable event. As is pointed out in the preface, so much ornithological work has been done during the last twenty-five years that revision has involved rewriting a great deal of the book, but on the whole the plan of the first edition has been retained. There are some short introductory chapters dealing with structure, migration, classification and similar topics. Then, after the main systematic part of the book, are sections dealing with the Moas, the other extinct birds, and the introduced birds. There is an extensive index. The book is profusely illustrated by photographs and drawings, many new ones being added in this edition, and by a series of coloured photographs instead of the former coloured plates of paintings.

In a work of this kind it is usually easy, by turning up subjects with which one is especially familiar, to pick on omissions and debatable statements, but it is somewhat unfair to do so in a general review. The attempt to present a summary in a convenient form of what is known about our birds has certainly succeeded: this book will be the reference work on the birds of New Zealand for many years to come and will have to be on the shelves of all who are seriously interested in birds. Dr Oliver puts forward views on classification, especially with regard to the dimorphic species, which will not meet with the agreement of all taxonomists. Non-biologists do not always realise that changes in classification are attempts to get at the truth, not mere gratuitous tiresomeness, and it is to be hoped that the differences between Dr Oliver's system and that used in the Chicklist will not cause any reader to become more averse to classification than ever.

The success of the attempt, mentioned in the preface, to be also a book useful 'not only for the professed ornithologist, but also to all interested in wildlife, including the tourist and tramp', is more questionable. The handling of the material is not adapted for field use; field characters and identifications are not stressed; and the keys, which are freely provided, are ones suitable for the museum. Nor is the format of the volume adapted for field use. It is certainly a handsome one, but it is large and heavy, and it is also expensive. A great deal could have been done to avoid these disadvantages, without any loss to the contents, by the use of different paper and by the elimination of some of the repetitive illustrations. The coloured plates especially must have been expensive, and they could have been omitted with no loss at all. Books have increased in price enormously of late years, but even the five volumes of the *Handbook of British Birds* together retail at £7. It is a pity that every effort was not made to reduce the price of this volume to within the reach of as many as possible. It is however unfair to expect a reference book for the library to be also suited to the jacket pocket and to the purse of the field naturalist. Oliver's *New Zealand Birds* will remain for many years unchallenged in its field, but there is still room in New Zealand for a small, cheap, practical handbook on birds for use out of doors.

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